

VZCZCXRO4852  
OO RUEHDBU RUEHFL RUEHKW RUEHLA RUEHROV RUEHSR  
DE RUEHSI #1702/01 1981251  
ZNY CCCCC ZZH  
O 171251Z JUL 07  
FM AMEMBASSY TBILISI  
TO RUEHC/SECSTATE WASHDC IMMEDIATE 7036  
INFO RUEHZL/EUROPEAN POLITICAL COLLECTIVE IMMEDIATE

C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 02 TBILISI 001702

SIPDIS

SIPDIS

DEPT FOR EUR DAS BRYZA & EUR/CARC

E.O. 12958: DECL: 07/17/2017  
TAGS: [PGOV](#) [PREL](#) [GG](#)  
SUBJECT: SOUTH OSSETIA: INCHING TOWARD DIALOGUE?

REF: A. TBILISI 1619

[1](#)B. TBILISI 1605

Classified By: Ambassador John F. Tefft for reasons 1.4(b)&(d).

#### Summary

-----  
[1](#)1. (C) Georgian and South Ossetian representatives are currently negotiating the details of a meeting of the Joint Control Commission (JCC) and a joint inspection of the contested drinking water pipe that runs through South Ossetia. While the sides have not reached final agreement on either issue, both sides have made small moves in the direction of compromise. In the meantime, the Georgian government has established a special commission to define the status of the new administrative unit in South Ossetia, inviting all political forces in the region to take part. The latest rotation of the Georgian peacekeeping battalion in South Ossetia is larger in number than other recent ones, coming closer to the maximum of 500 as we have urged in the past. Georgian Defense Minister Kezerashvili told the Ambassador that he does not expect a major eruption of violence in the region. He said de facto leader Kokoity is nervous that some of his staff will switch sides. End Summary.

#### Close to a Tbilisi JCC?

-----  
[1](#)2. (SBU) The sides have been exchanging counterproposals for a JCC meeting for several weeks, with the Georgians dropping their earlier condition that JCC working groups should first agree on an agenda for the full JCC meeting. While this eliminated a potential source of delay, the Georgians continued to insist that the meeting be held in Tbilisi -- where the South Ossetians have refused to go in recent years -- or, failing that, somewhere in Europe. On July 13, three of the JCC co-chairs (Russia, North Ossetia, and South Ossetia -- all but Georgia) met in Tskhinvali and expressed a willingness to convene the JCC in Tbilisi. South Ossetian co-chair Boris Chochiev, citing alleged security concerns, insisted that such a meeting be held in the Russian Embassy. The Georgians counter-proposed the OSCE Mission as the site. OSCE officials tell us that, in addition to the continuing dispute over location, there is also some difference of opinion on the agenda, with the Georgians now favoring an "open agenda" while the South Ossetians are calling for a "preliminary agenda" to be agreed in advance.

#### Another Try at Water Pipe Inspection

-----  
[1](#)3. (C) OSCE has been trying to broker a way out of the ongoing controversy over water (ref A). Several attempts over the last week to organize expert meetings or field visits to inspect the pipe have been postponed, with the South Ossetians explaining July 12 that their engineers first needed time to repair a section of the pipe in an

Ossetian-controlled area north of Java. Georgian Deputy State Minister for Conflict Resolution Ruslan Abashidze told us July 12 that he saw this as an encouraging indication that de facto authorities had come to recognize that the problems inhibiting the flow of water to Tskhinvali were in their area. OSCE has told us they would again try to set up a meeting July 17 with two engineers from each side, with the hope that after the meeting the four engineers would divide into two mixed teams that would conduct separate inspections in Kheiti and in the area around Andisi and Kekhvi.

#### Autonomy Commission Established

-----

¶4. (U) It was reported July 13 that President Saakashvili had signed a decree to establish a special commission, headed by Prime Minister Zurab Noghaideli, to define the status of South Ossetia, granting it broader autonomy within Georgia's borders. All political forces in the region, including the Georgian-backed temporary administrative unit of Dmitry Sanakoyev and the de facto authorities in Tskhinvali, were publicly invited to join in the commission's work.

#### Kezerashvili on South Ossetia

-----

¶5. (C) In a meeting with the Ambassador July 12, Defense Minister Kezerashvili said that the number of Georgian peacekeepers in the South Ossetia conflict zone had increased from 350 to 450 during the recent rotation. He said the new rotation was equipped with BMP armored vehicles. The new number is closer to the agreed maximum of 500 peacekeepers for a single side, and we have long encouraged the Georgians to get closer to their authorized strength, though in the past they have argued that stretched resources limited the size and length of the deployments.

TBILISI 00001702 002 OF 002

¶6. (C) Echoing the assessment of Minister of Internal Affairs Merabishvili (ref B), Kezerashvili indicated that he did not expect a major explosion of tensions in South Ossetia this summer. Kezerashvili said that clearly Kokoity was nervous, and in particular he was worried that some of his staff would jump to Sanakoyev. Kezerashvili said the Russians continue to distribute money in the region in an effort to keep people loyal to the de facto regime. Kezerashvili said he had information that Russia had recently conducted a training of the 58th division in Russia just north of the Georgian border, in an exercise designed to prepare them to "help" Russian peacekeepers in South Ossetia if needed. Kezerashvili said two Russian SU 25 aircraft had recently crossed into Georgian territory, coming in over Kazbegi, and that such unauthorized overflights had become a regular occurrence.

TEFFT